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How To Write A Business Letter

By
L.R. Collier



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L. R. COLLIER

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HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER

BY

L. R. COLLIER



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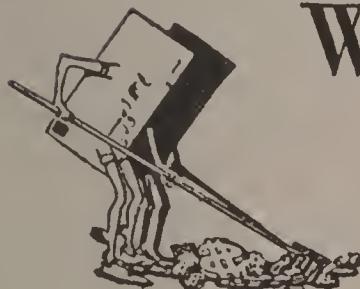


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HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER



WHAT is the greatest force in business today? What has done more towards building up the commercial supremacy of America than any other one factor? What is the most used and the most abused medium in the whole business world?

The Modern Business Letter

It is the first thing you turn to in the morning—the last thing you attend to at night. It creates prestige, it finds new customers, it opens doors to your salesmen, it sells goods, it collects accounts, it answers complaints, it satisfies angry

customers—it does everything a personal representative could do, and frequently it does it better.

Concerns that ten years ago were struggling along on a shoe string, are today great and prosperous—all from the judicious use of “right” letters. Coal mines, corsets, automobiles, houses—all conceivable kinds of products—are marketed by mail. Sears, Roebuck & Co. did a business of \$250,000,000 last year—entirely by mail. Every concern, great and small, uses the mails and is dependent upon them—in short, they are today the life blood of business.

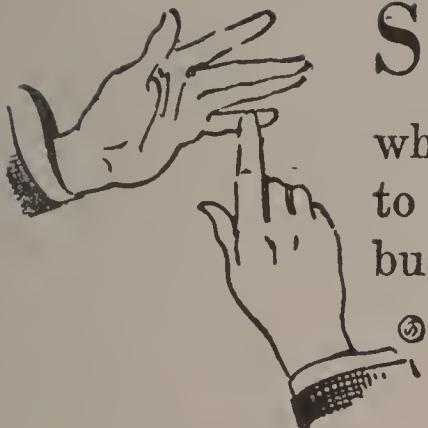
How important it is, then, that your letters should truly represent YOU—that they should reflect your personality, put over your ideas, win the attention, the interest and the action that you would if you were with the reader in person. And yet—think a moment—how many of the letters that come to your desk every day contain any of the

life, the “punch,” that their writers possess? How many merit even passing attention?

Is it any wonder, then, that in a recent Congressional investigation it was brought out that 98% of all circular letters are thrown away unread? Think of that! And the reason? Lack of interest, lack of “punch,” lack of that peculiar ability to fit your start in with your reader’s trend of thought. Think what an enormous saving could be effected if every business correspondent understood the few, simple, fundamental principles of “right” letter-writing.

Yet if you were to ask these same correspondents, they would tell you—“Oh, it can’t be done!” That’s the old standby of the weak, the inefficient, the stand-patters too old or too lazy to change. But it *can* be done—it is being done every day—it is just a matter of finding the right method, of hitting upon the proper motive.

Why, the first big Publishing House I was ever connected with as Mail Order Manager had tried six different times to start the sale of their books by mail, without success, yet by merely changing their method, by putting a new angle to their offer, we sold \$35,000 worth of books within four months after our first letter went out! That seemed big results then, but since then I have frequently “passed” more orders than that in a single day.



STARTING at the very beginning, what is the first thing to do in writing any business letter?

Before you put pen to paper, before you ring for your stenographer, decide in your own mind just what effect you want that letter to produce on your reader—what feeling it must create in him to make him order your goods—pay his account—give you the job. For back of every successful letter, whether it be a sales, collection, complaint or adjustment letter, is a created feeling that impels the reader to act as you want him.

The Parisians' formula for writing letters may do very well for love letters, but it was never meant to apply to busi-

ness—"Begin without knowing what you are going to say, and end without knowing what you have said."

Put yourself in your reader's place. Think how you would have to feel before you would be willing to place that order, to grant that extension, to send those overdue payments. What would you want to know? What about the proposition would interest you most? What would you gain by accepting it? What would you lose by refusing?



YOUR reader, looking over his mail, gets a series of impressions just as you might if you were looking from the window of a train. You catch a fleeting glimpse of some object, you turn for a closer inspection. If that interests you, you observe every detail carefully, otherwise your glance wanders off again in search of some more interesting object.

Every mail brings your reader ten, twenty, a hundred letters urging him to buy this or that, to pay up some bill, to try out some new device. He glances at them casually, hurriedly. Unless your letter has something about it that stands out from the mass—that catches his eye

—that arouses his interest—away it goes into the waste paper basket.

Your problem, therefore, is to find some point of contact, some feature, that will flag your reader's interest, that will make your letter stand out from all others the moment he reads the first line.

But it won't do to yell "Fire!" just to get him to look your way. That may get you a moment's attention, but you'll lose it the next unless you can back it up, and once lost you'll never get it again.

Go up to your reader just as you would go up to a man standing talking with some friends. You wouldn't break in on their conversation with some startling statement about a totally foreign subject. You'd listen a moment and get the trend of their talk. You'd join in that, and then lead it around to the subject you were interested in.

Everyone is constantly holding a men-

tal conversation with himself about the things he is interested in. You must chime in with that conversation. You must pick up the trend of your reader's thoughts and go on from them to your own, making your letter join in with his conversation. It's easy—merely a matter of putting yourself in the other fellow's place.

Suppose, for instance, you were the mother of a month-old baby. What would be most in your thoughts? Well, imagine then, how such a letter as this would appeal to you:

“After baby's food and baby's clothes, the most important thing you have to decide upon is the little cart baby is going to ride in—is going to be seen in—is going to be admired in.

“Never a child came into the world but was worthy as good a cart—etc.”

Or if you were the father of a six or eight-year-old boy, wouldn't this get under your skin?

“Your boy is a little shaver now; he thinks you are the most wonderful man in the world. You can fix his boat, mend his velocipede, tell him wonderful stories.

“But it will be only ten or twelve years until he goes to College. The fathers of the other boys—his chums—will go to see them. There will be a Railroad President, perhaps; and a great Banker; and a Governor.

“And you will go; and your boy will say: ‘This is my father, boys.’

“How will he feel when he says it? Will he be proud of you?”

Or if you were a Doctor, sitting in your office or library, wouldn’t you agree with this?

“What a clutter of books a Doctor can get around him—and what a fearful outlay of money they will come to represent if he doesn’t use great discrimination in their purchase.”

Or if you were a housewife, worrying

over the day's marketing, wouldn't you welcome such a suggestion as this?

"I think if I lived away from the sea-shore and someone wrote me, offering to send me fish right from the boats, I'd be mighty pleased. I'd jump at the chance to get it. For if there is anything that tastes good to a person who lives inland, it's GOOD fish. Probably because it's so hard to get the GOOD kind in the stores. But I—etc."

Or if you were interested in rare or unusual bric-a-brac:

"Of all the odd things I have seen happen in rather a long and active business career, this I believe to be the oddest:

"To have a few of the historically famous '75' M/M Shells, saved intact from war's ravages by a chain of circumstances, almost Providential; to have a great artist discover in the stately lines of those shells the ideal shape for a beautiful table lamp; to have written you telling you all about

this wonderful lamp and offering you the chance to have one at a price less than half the price an equally good lamp usually sells for in a store—

“—and then not to hear a word from you!”

Or if you were any business man, puzzling over some intricate problem, wouldn’t this hit you where you live?

“That vexing question answered—that business problem solved—directly, accurately, instantly—and you need not even leave your desk.”



OF course, there are ways of flagging the reader's interest even before he gets to

the first line of your letter. Putting a catch phrase on the outside of your envelope is one, like—"If the Darned Fools Only Knew,' said Roosevelt." A clever design at the top of a letter, or an attention-arresting sentence there, is also good. "Spies at Work!" written in red ink across the top of a book-selling letter helped it materially, as did also "Your last chance to get True Stories Free!" on another.

Perhaps the most effective of all is using an illustrated, colored letter head. Properly done, this will almost invariably improve returns, and in a number of cases it has doubled them. But a

mere splurge of color won't do this—in fact, it will frequently work the contrary effect. The illustrations must be appropriate, they must be good, and the coloring must be of the best.

All this applies to sales letters. If a man has, or thinks he has, a grievance against you, the mere sight of your name on the envelope will recall that grievance to him. So it is a very simple matter to fit your start in with his line of thought. Suppose you wrote him:

“We certainly don't blame you for getting ‘riled’ at receiving no answer to your three letters complaining about the non-arrival of your order. In your place, we, too, would feel that there was something radically wrong with an organization that showed so little attention to as old and tried a customer as you.

“But—etc.”



IN acknowledging an order or tracking a shipment, on the other hand, the thing your reader wants to know first is what has been done about it, so start right in with real information:

“Your order of XYZ went forward by express this morning.”

Or

“We located your car of coal in the yards at XX last night and persuaded Trainmaster Smith to couple it on to fast freight No. 99 and rush it straight through. It should be on your siding tomorrow morning.”

Letters such as this require no effort to reach the reader’s train of thought. All he wants to know is the facts about

the case and he looks to you to give them to him. So go right to the heart of your subject in the opening paragraph. You don't need to acknowledge his letter—he'll take it for granted you got that. Start right out with the things he wants to know.

Here are two complete letters that show the importance of this matter of starting right. The first wanders all around with general statements and inconsequential remarks and gets nowhere. Probably not one man in a hundred reads through even the first paragraph. The second grips your attention at once and then follows that up logically with description, argument, proof and inducement. Needless to say, it brought home the bacon.

“Dear Friend:—

“We are requested by one who is deeply interested in our work to ask you if you are aware of the ‘World Dangers’ resulting from the present

alignment of the nations of the world and their direct bearing on your religious and political belief, your business career and the welfare of the home life of the American peoples generally that the present world convulsions will affect.

“The greatest American of his day, when he saw a World War was inevitable, said, ‘Oh! If they only knew’ yet today we are confronted with problems and dangers much greater than he realized. Do you intend to face these blindly or with a mind alert to these dangers, or would you wish to have the opinions of those who have made them a lifetime study and whose articles appearing in the—magazine will place you in a position to guard your interests from what is now threatening this nation and your own future particularly.

“Our magazine is firmly established as the only one which vividly portrays the true conditions we are in and has become a text book for all religious denominations, schools and libraries as well as a far-sighted and political guide.

“As it is impossible for the news stands to carry a supply equal to the demand, although selling for thirty-five cents a copy, we enclose herewith a blank form to be filled in and returned to us. Should you decide to subscribe to the _____ magazine for the next two years we will mail you, free of cost, the complete seven lesson course on ‘Physical Training and Life Extension’ and give you the privilege of sending us the names, addresses and occupations of not more than five of your intimate friends whom you would like to interest in our work. These names must be written on the reverse side of this letter and returned to us and we will then extend to them the same offer we are making to you.”

Compare that with this:

“Dear Sir:—

“One of the most interesting items in recent biography is the story of how Joseph Pulitzer, handicapped by blindness, fed his wonderful mind to the last by employing a corps of ex-

pert readers who skimmed the cream from the world's news and passed it along to him with a quickness which he would probably have found impossible even with his eyesight, in the midst of the large affairs that demanded his time as the executive head of a great metropolitan daily newspaper.

“The business executive ordinarily has not the means of sorting out from the great mass of business facts only those of special interest and value for himself.

“The heaped up mass of reading matter on his desk points clearly to the want of an instrument that will perform for him the task of Mr. Pulitzer's staff of secretaries.

“Perhaps you have felt, as have so many other business men, the want for a business magazine that shall present essential business facts in their relation to other business facts and that shall be at once timely, comprehensive and authentic.

“It is in response to that want that The Chamber of Commerce published its official monthly magazine, *The Nation's Business*.

“The Nation’s Business was published originally for the especial benefit of members of the national chamber.

“The information it provides is held to be so important at this time that we are authorized to increase the number to whom we send The Nation’s Business each month.

“It is sold by subscription for \$3 a year. It is not published for profit; as a member of the Chamber said recently, ‘It is published not for what it can make, but for what it can do.’

“Your subscription is invited.”

There is just one thing to be guarded against in working up your reader’s interest—and that is an anti-climax. I have in mind a very eloquent lawyer who was defending a moving-van company against a suit for loss of household goods by fire while they were in the company’s van.

This lawyer won every juror’s breathless interest the moment he started. “Gentlemen,” he exclaimed impress-

ively, "I want you to remember that these are war times. My clients contracted to move this man's *household goods*—not a load of *explosives*. I am going to prove to you that included among his effects were *high explosives*."

Every man in the court room sat forward eagerly; everyone waited with bated breath, expecting to hear the details of some hideous plot.

Imagine their disappointment, then, when it was brought out that the explosives consisted of nothing more dangerous than half a dozen shot-gun shells left in an old duck-hunting vest. The jury returned a verdict against the van company without moving from their seats.

Put in brief, the whole secret of getting your reader's attention is to find the point of contact between your proposition and some vital need of his. It may be done by a clever news story, as in the case of the magazine subscription

letter. It may be by reference to the one thing nearest the reader's heart, as with the mother and her baby. It may be an appeal to pride, as in the case of the father of a boy; it may be to gain, as with the business man. But whichever it is, *bring out that need in your very first line*—play upon it—then, when you've made your tie-up with his thoughts, bring in your proposition, show how it satisfies his need—appeal to his own self-interest!

*GETTING YOUR IDEA ACROSS

See The Point?



AFTER you have gotten the reader's attention, the next thing is to get your idea across —win his interest in your proposition—so describe it that he can see it as you see it.

The secret of visualizing your proposition in a letter is largely a matter of imitating David Harum the time he was telling some friends about having heard "The Lost Chord," but couldn't remember its name. He just described it in terms of things that they knew:

"It's about a feller sittin' one day by the org'n," he told them, "an' not

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feelin' exac'ly right—kind o' tired
an' out o' sorts an' not knowin' jes'
where he was drivin' at—jes' joggin'
along with a loose rein fer quite a
piece, an' so on; an' then, by an' by,
strikin' right into his gait an' goin'
on stronger an' stronger, an' fin'ly
finishin' up with an A—men that car-
ries him quarter way 'round the track
'fore he c'n pull up."

Thousands of sales have been lost,
millions of dollars of business have
failed to materialize, solely because so
few letter-writers have that knack of
visualizing a proposition—of painting it
in words so the reader can see it as they
see it.

After you have caught your reader's
attention, after you have won his inter-
est, there still remains this difficult job
of getting your idea over—of picturing
your proposition to him.

The secret of success in it lies in pick-
ing out some feature of your proposition

that he can easily grasp, some object or idea he is thoroughly familiar with, and building upon that. Probably the best example on record is Washington Irving's description of the school-mas- ter in the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow":

"He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow, sloping shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, and his whole framework most loosely hung to- gether. His head was small, etc."

See how he gives you the most obvious feature first, qualifies it, adds to it, then supplies further details until the whole picture is filled in.

Remember this, though: Your reader can grasp but one idea at a time. As he reads your letter, he builds a picture with the words you give him, like a child building a house with blocks. Give him, therefore, the big, essential ones first, the little filling-in details later, or your whole structure will tumble down.

Start with the feature he can most readily comprehend—build on that and make every additional feature advance the central idea—take him one step nearer the goal. If it won't do that, cut it out.

Here is the way other successful writers have done it:

“Old age is merely our name for the gradual poisoning of our bodies. Aches and pains burrowing and creeping through the system, a relaxed abdomen, deepening lines on the face, jangling nerves, a haunting feeling of dullness and gloom—these outward signs indicate that actual poisons are being deposited in blood, tissues and joints.”

“Here are real stories of real characters—memorable, astounding. Here are the adventures of the amazing Mascarin and his rascally band—the Robin Hood of Paris. Here are the escapades of the celebrated Vidocq—soldier, adventurer, criminal, galley

slave—first chief of the reorganized detective bureau of Paris.”

“If you like mackerel that is white and juicy, thickmeated and fat, cod-fish that is tender and ‘good-tasting,’ lobster that’s as sweet, fresh and dainty as though you had just taken it from the shell, let me supply you.

“With your appetite sharpened by the tempting aroma of a Davis ‘first choice’ fish, you won’t need to be urged to eat—you’ll come to the table knowing that here’s a meal you’ll truly enjoy. For Davis fish never disappoint. In the flavor of these ‘first choice’ fish there’s a wholesome goodness that appeals to everyone. You’ll realize it as you taste the first morsel.”

“You can make your body live, supple, muscular, full of energy and vitality. You can have a clear brain, a powerful heart, a massive chest, broad, muscular shoulders, a wrist and arm of steel. All these were meant for you—all these you can have if you will but learn and obey a few simple natural laws.”

“This mark certifies that the hog came from good stock, that it was corn-fed in order that it might be firm and sweet—that it was a barrow hog, so that the meat would be full-flavored and juicy—that it was a young hog, making the ham thin-skinned and tender, well-conditioned and fat, insuring the lean of the ham to be tasty and nutritious.”

In short, your problem is much the same as that of the newspaper paragrapher. He sums up the meat of his story in two or three words in his headline. Then he adds a sub-head, giving a few essential details. Then a few lines, elaborating or explaining these. With this frame-work to build upon, he fills in his story.

SUPPLYING THE REASON WHY



THE average man is like an automobile. He can be pushed and pulled along or he can be moved to action by starting up his own motive power from within. The latter method is called exercising persuasion. You must give your reader a motive—a reason why he should do as you want him—or he won't do it. The secret of persuasion is to arouse in your reader a motive that will impel him to the action you desire.

There are six prime motives of human action—

- Love
- Gain
- Duty
- Pride
- Self-Indulgence
- Self-Preservation

Experienced letter writers always choose the strongest motives when there is room for choice, but you must always remember to distinguish between the idea that the reader is to be sold on and the motive that will persuade him to sign the order. For the idea that will make a business man want to possess an office appliance may be pride in the appearance of his office, but the motive that will make him buy may be the safeguarding of his records.

The strongest motive of all is Love—love of wife or sweetheart, love of parents or children. Given the right touch, that appeal will get anything you want from your reader. Write a mother like this, for instance, and if she can in any way manage it, you will get her order:

“You know how the little folks just love a good story—how they’d rather listen to one than eat or play or sleep—how they beg you, sometimes, to tell them a story, to read to them.

“They will read something, you know, and it’s what they read now that determines what they are to be—it’s their heroes, their ideals, the men and women who are made to seem to them wonderful and worthy to pattern after, that form your children’s characters.

“If you could pick from all the literature of the world just the stories of folk-lore and fable, just the tales of fiction and history, just the poems that would give your children the right ideals, that would stimulate them to their best efforts, that would give the finest ground-work for their later studies, and if you could have the advice of the best-read man and the greatest educator of his day as to that reading, you’d feel that no price was too high to pay for it.

“You *can* get just those stories, tales and poems—846 of them—etc.”

See how this letter appeals to her love for her children—her anxiety for their well-being—her ambition that they should grow up into worthy men and

women. Then how cleverly it shows her just how she can insure this.

Next to "Love" in pulling power is the "Gain" motive. Show a man how he can make more money, how he can rise to position and power, how he can effect some big saving, and you have his interest. It is by appealing to this motive that "Power of Will" has made such a big success—that the International Correspondence Schools have built up the biggest business of its kind in the world—that business courses and business books are sold by the hundred thousand.

"Five Days to Prove I Can Raise Your Pay" is one of the "Power of Will" catch phrases. "A New Idea That Makes Men Rich" is another.

Of course, the more motives your proposition appeals to, the more successful it will be. Most good letters appeal to two or three different motives, some-

times in one paragraph, frequently in the same sentence. “Save one-fourth and Have the Best” is a common instance.

Here is one that gives motive and proof together. “On page 112 of this book there is a cost system all worked out that saved Jones & Co. \$20,000 a year in office expense.”

Here is a good appeal to that feeling of pride that everyone has in possessing rare pieces of art.

“A Lamp That Can Never Be Made Again!

“There is an old saying that ‘What man has done, man can do again,’ but this is one case where man is powerless. A COMBINATION OF CIRCUMSTANCES created this lamp—a combination which could not occur again in a century.

“Unless the great war should be fought over again; unless the terrible Morgan explosion of munitions should occur again; unless out of its train of

disasters a small lot of the famous '75' shells should be saved again; and then unless an armistice should come again at just the right moment to make the use of these shells for war unnecessary—unless all these things should happen again in just that order, not another of these beautiful, massive ROMANTIC lamps can ever be created."

The motives of duty, pride, self-indulgence and self-preservation bring results in the order named, but they are frequently so intermingled that it is hard to tell exactly which one you are appealing to most. "The Kind of Man You Want to Be" might be an appeal to either gain or pride. "Physical Vigor and Success" might be either self-preservation or gain, but as long as you give the reader a good, strong reason for doing as you want him, the exact motive is not of such great consequence.

Summed up in words of two syllables, the question of arousing the proper mo-

tive is simply a matter of making your reader want your product, not by describing *it*, but by showing what it will do for *him*, how he will benefit by getting it, what he will lose by not having it.

GETTING ACTION



THE need of an impulse at the critical moment has been recognized and used for years. Watch the crowd in front of a side show at the circus and you will see that at just the right moment in the barker's talk his assistants on the outside of the crowd start a general push forward towards the ticket window.

The first thing to do is to find the proper motive your letter should arouse and then seek some easy preliminary task on which that motive can be set at work. The next step is to make it easier for the writer, already started, to go forward than to halt and go back.

When you have an important letter

to write, put down on paper the final action you desire, whether it be to send you an order or to pay a bill. Then write down the motive that will impel your reader to perform that action. Then think out some action you can set that motive busy on.

For instance, here's the way one shoe manufacturer closed his letter to the wholesalers:

“Just pick out ten customers who are good shoe buyers. Tell them frankly you think you've gotten hold of a better shoe and say you want them to try out one case and tell you how they work. Put it up to them square. That will be ten cases sold the first week—and seven out of these ten retailers, we guarantee, will tell you they are the best shoes they ever handled at the price and they will be seven customers who will push those shoes thereafter to the exclusion of all competing lines.

“And if the other three don't like

them, they will be almost as pleased because you tried to help them.

“Why, that will pay you just as advertising — not free advertising alone, but advertising that pays you the profit on ten cases of shoes.

“We will do our part and back our own scheme by billing you for the ten cases at the quantity price regularly given on 100-case orders—if you put them out in that way.

“There’s a bully good plan—you try out the proposition without a chance to lose and a sure profit besides.

“Is it a go?”

Your reader, in short, is interested. You’ve caught his attention, won his interest, described your proposition and showed him his need of it, but he hasn’t quite made up his mind. He balks at putting his name on the dotted line. “Some other time!” “Tomorrow!” That little word “Tomorrow” has lost more sales than all other causes put together. So don’t ask him to decide defi-

nitely on your main proposition—put his mind to working on some minor point—ask him whether he thinks six cases are enough for a thorough try-out—then get your decision on that minor point that yet carries the major with it.

*THE CLINCHER TO THE LETTER



AS the tail is to the kite, as the rudder is to the ship, so is the close to any important letter. It may be a perfectly good letter aside from that. It may fit right in with the reader's thoughts, it may win his interest, it may spur him to action; but if it doesn't tell him what to do, if it doesn't provide a penalty for his not doing it, your prospect will slip away from you like a fish off the hook.

There is just one reason why anyone ever reads a letter you send him. He expects a reward. That is the key to holding his interest. All through your letter, you keep leading him on and on, constantly feeding his interest, but al-

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ways holding something back for the climax—the close.

In the same way, there is only one reason why your reader will do as you want him to. He fears the penalty you hold over him. It may be a delinquent debtor in fear of loss of credit standing or of court action. It may be the buyer fearing to lose a good opportunity. It may be the merchant fearing to lose your trade. It may be the ambitious youngster fearing to lose an opportunity for advancement. But unless your close can inspire action through the fear of loss—of money or prestige or opportunity—it won't bring results.

And to inspire that action, be definite! Be specific! If you are threatening suit, tell your reader when you are going to put the account in your lawyer's hands—make him act within a stated time. If you are going to advance your price, set a definite date for it. Make your reader feel that this is his last chance—keep

that penalty dangling before his mind's eye—the money-saving lost—the opportunity missed. Put into your close the fear of consequences.

Finally, tell him *what* to do. Don't leave it to him to decide. We're all mentally lazy, so dictate his action for him—get your suggester to work. If he is to do certain things—*describe* them. Tell him to "Put your name on the enclosed card, stamp and mail," or "Pin your check or dollar bill to this letter and mail in the enclosed envelope," or "Sit down now and fill out the order form, write your check and mail in the stamped envelope enclosed."

Show him that he takes no chances in doing as you tell him. Quote the testimonials of prominent men, or submit a list of users, or, best of all, give him a money-back-if-not-satisfied guarantee.

Here's the way others have done it:

"To prove it, all you have to do is

fill in, sign and mail this card. After 30 days you CAN return the machine IF YOU WANT TO!

“Try it out! Never mind what we SAY your shop men will get out of it—FIND OUT! It’s easy. Just send the card.”

“Remember, an order is simply an opportunity for the Royal to sell itself to you. There is no sale—no obligation to keep it—until you have used it in your own shop for 60 days AND ARE SATISFIED! Just let us send it along.”

“But you’re playing safe—your dollar has a STRING to it. It isn’t mine until you say so. You get it back if you’re willing to give back the books.

“And it’s all at my risk, anyway. Why hesitate or hem and haw?”

“This won’t put you under the least obligation. If we can’t show you that it is to your interest to go into the matter further, it’s our fault

—not yours. Mail the card now and let us put the facts before you.”

“Don’t file this away to ‘think over.’ There’s nothing to puzzle about, because you don’t have to send one penny or promise anything other than that you will return the goods if you don’t like them.

“That’s easy, isn’t it? Just use the postcard.”

“Simply pin a two-dollar bill to this letter as a deposit and we will send the book by the first mail. Look it over carefully. If you don’t see a dollar’s worth in almost every page, write us a mere postcard and we will return the two dollars.

“There are no restrictions, no conditions, no strings to this offer. It is open to every well-rated business man who acts before the first edition of the book is exhausted. Pin your two dollars to this letter and mail today.”

“Remember, we sell on the complete understanding that if the machine is not perfectly satisfactory—or

better still, completely to your liking—it can be returned at our expense and your money will be promptly refunded.”

“Fill out the enclosed slip and mail it today. It will bring you the samples at once, so that you can start this department with no delay.

“Remember, you risk nothing—all you have to think about is your profit.”

“Signing and sending the enclosed card ‘puts the burden of proof upon us’ and incurs not the slightest obligation.

“May we hope you will **MAIL IT TODAY?**”

“Here is my offer: Tell me on the order blank what to send you. Try the goods in your home; then if you don’t decide that they are every bit as good as you expected, return what you have left at my expense. Those you have used in making the test cost you nothing. Could I be fairer? Before you put this letter down, get

your pencil ready. You will be well repaid for acting promptly—I promise you that."

"But you must act now—only 2700 copies of this book remain on hand and live manufacturers will snap up this offer. So pin your money to this letter and mail it today."

"BURN THIS IN YOUR MIND:

"It MIGHT be a blamed-sight more expensive NOT to read it. NOT to read it may cost you MANY THOUSANDS!! Think it over. I'll be \$2 richer if you write today and put that amount in the envelope, BUT AT THE END OF A YEAR YOU'LL LOOK BACK AND SAY THAT \$2 WAS THE MOST MIRACULOUSLY MULTIPLYING MONEY YOU EVER PARTED WITH IN YOUR LIFE!!

"For 'The — Story' is the miracle book that builds new back-bone and bigger bank accounts.

"It will pay huge dividends to you and you alone. **SEND** for it—don't miss it for a Million.

"S-E-N-D T-O-D-A-Y!"

In conclusion, remember that a successful close has two parts. The first consists of persuasion and inducement—it shows the gain to the reader in ordering, the loss that is his by delay. It emphasizes the guarantee and minimizes the cost.

When he gets that far, your reader is *almost* ready to act, but your close lacks a clincher. What must he do to get all these things? *Tell him!* Make it so plain and easy he won't have a reason on earth for not ordering. If you don't, you haven't finished your letter, and lacking the effect of that clincher, your reader is going to lapse from his "almost ready" attitude back into indifference.

COLLECTION LETTERS



PERHAPS there is no better example of this than in collection letters. If any letter needs a clincher—if any letter requires a firm, positive statement of just what the reader must do and when, the collection letter does. Yet nowhere do you find more namby-pamby phrases, more “Trusting to hear from you” and “Hoping to receive a remittance” than in collection letters. Just listen to this one:

“You are undoubtedly aware of the balance due on your account. I believe you care little for dunning letters, and for me to personally write of the whole affair would consume considerable unnecessary time.

“Extensive experience has led us to conclude that there is a positive danger in your failure to give regular attention to payments. When you fail

to send them in promptly it does not take long for back payments to accumulate to such an extent that it is a great inconvenience—and often an unanticipated impossibility—to pay at all.

“Not having heard from you for quite some time, I ask you to please confer a personal favor by advising me when I can expect a remittance, or possibly make known the circumstances that have prevented payment.

“Thanking you in advance for this personal courtesy.”

Could anything be better calculated to lull the debtor into a sense of security, to make him feel—“Of course these people want their money, but they are too diffident to ever do anything about it”? Compare that with this courteous but forceful, definite request for payment:

“Dear Sir:

YOU FORGOT

“—that check you were going to send to us, ten days ago.

“We don’t like to keep reminding you of it—but we dislike still more the expense and trouble of carrying one month’s accounts over into the next. So won’t you PLEASE let us have that check to-day?

“Don’t bother to write a letter—we understand how such oversights occur—just pin your check or money order to this letter and return in the enclosed envelope.

“Yours for co-operation”

Or this:

“Dear Sir:

“Some people, the minute a delay or dispute arises in the payment of a bill of theirs, want to rush to the law about it. They think that the only reason that a person can have for not paying a bill when it is due must be dishonesty.

“But we know better.

“We have dealt with too many people not to know that only a very, very small percentage are deliberately dishonest.

“But many perfectly honest people get classed with the ‘dead beats’ simply because they are careless. They fully intend to pay, and do pay eventually, but because the amounts involved are small, they put them off.

“Now we know that you fully intend to pay the \$—— overdue on your account—we know that eventually we will get the money, but that difference between ‘eventually’ and ‘now’ is what marks the line between the ‘gilt-edged’ customer and the ‘poor pay’.

“You want to be in the gilt-edged class, even if you never buy another book from us or another dollar’s worth of goods on credit. It’s such a pleasant feeling to know that you are a ‘preferred risk’—that any merchant will be glad to extend credit privileges to you if you want them. Get back into that class by pinning your check or money order to this letter now, and dropping it in the mail.”

In collection letters, as in everything else, it is well to remember that you can



catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

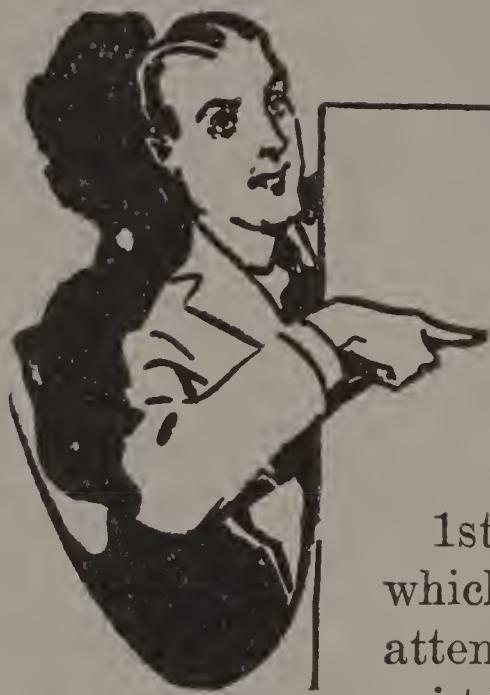
Generally speaking, the first three or four letters should adopt the attitude that the debtor has merely overlooked the account and will pay promptly now that the matter has been called to his attention. If three or four such letters don't get a rise out of him, however, it is time to point out to him a few of the unpleasant consequences that will accrue to him if he doesn't pay promptly.

"If there is any doubt in your mind," writes one creditor, "as to the position you have placed yourself in by your apparent failure to act in good faith, we suggest that you consult your attorney and ask him to read to you Section — of the General Statutes of the United States. This may cost you several dollars, but it will be money well spent."

"We collect money," writes another, "peaceably if possible, forcibly if necessary—but we collect!"

How many collection letters should you send before having recourse to the law? It all depends upon the circumstances and the business. In handling installment accounts, I have known a series of 15 to 20 to pay. With ordinary commercial accounts, it shouldn't take more than five or six letters to lead up to a draft, and after that, two or three more to lead to a lawyer, though the law is a last resort and should never be appealed to if there is any possible way around it.

Close collections, as a rule, are good collections. If you follow a man up the moment his account starts to lag behind, if you camp right on his trail and keep reminding him courteously, but firmly, of that overdue balance, the chances are you will get it.



To sum up,
every good
letter contains
these six essen-
tial elements:

1st—The Opening, which gets the reader's attention by fitting in with his train of thought, and establishes a point of contact with his interests, thus exciting his curiosity and prompting him to read further.

2nd—The Description or Explanation, which pictures your proposition to the reader by first outlining its important features, and then filling in the necessary details.

3rd—The Motive, or Reason Why, which creates a longing in your reader's mind for what you are selling, or impels him to do as you want him by describing, not your proposition, but what it will do for him—the comforts, the pleasure, the profits he will get from it.

4th—The Proof or Guarantee, which offers to the reader proof of the truth of your statements, or establishes confidence by a money-back-if-not-satisfied guarantee.

5th—The Snapper or Penalty, which gets immediate action by holding over your reader's head the loss in money, or prestige, or opportunity that will be his if he doesn't act at once.

6th—The Close, which tells the reader just what to do and how to do it, and makes it easy for him to act at once.

These elements may not always appear in this exact order, but they are in

every good letter. They may all be contained in a single paragraph, or they may be spread out over a dozen pages.

Some authorities will tell you to write only short, crisp letters—others to write nothing but long ones. Both are wrong. There is no hard and fast rule covering how long a letter should be, excepting that it should be long enough to tell your story, but short enough to hold the reader's interest.

As a general proposition, a letter in which you seek only inquiries should be short, whereas a letter in which you are trying to sell something should be long enough to tell all about your proposition. As Lincoln put it when someone asked him how long a man's legs should be—“They should be long enough to reach the ground.”

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